United Nations A/C.2/63/SR.16

General Assembly
Sixty-third session

Official Records

Distr.: General
19 December 2008

Original: English

Second Committee

Summary record of the 16th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 23 October 2008, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Torrington (Vice-Chairperson) ..... (Guyana)

Contents

Agenda item 53: Eradication of poverty and other development issues (*continued*)

(a) Implementation of the second United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2008-2017) (*continued*)

(b) Industrial development cooperation (*continued*)

Agenda item 46: Information and communication technologies for development

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

08-56520 (E)

In the absence of Ms. Ogwu (Nigeria), Mr. Torrington (Guyana), Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 53: Eradication of poverty and other development issues (*continued*) (A/63/123; A/C.2/63/3)

(a) Implementation of the second United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2008-2017) (*continued*) (A/63/159 and A/63/190)

(b) Industrial development cooperation (*continued*) (A/63/309)

1. **Mr. de Looz Karageorgiades** (Observer for the Sovereign Military Order of Malta) said that the consequences of the current financial crisis were reverberating around the world, particularly among the poor and the unemployed. Words were no longer enough; ethical behaviour must guide all aspects of life. The interdependence of today's world called for new expressions of solidarity. The world had become obsessed with wealth and forgotten about poverty. With the current financial crisis, however, poverty was becoming more visible again.

2. The primary mission of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta for over 900 years had been to serve the poor and the sick and assist the helpless and refugees, whatever their race, origin or religion. The Order, which had no political bias, enjoyed diplomatic relations with over 100 countries. Its 12,500 members, 80,000 experts, 15,000 employees and 46 national associations formed an exceptional network that provided medical and humanitarian assistance in 120 countries.

3. Echoing other speakers in stressing the importance of partnerships and innovative mechanisms such as the Delivering as One initiative, he said that the Order had followed such an approach since 2003. Indeed, Malteser International's 2007 annual report outlined the activities of 29 organizations involved in humanitarian assistance and development. Together, they implemented some 5,000 projects.

4. Today, the eradication of poverty was seen as an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humanity. In the words of Father Joseph Wresinski, founder of International Movement ATD Fourth World, wherever men and women were condemned to live in poverty, human rights were violated. To come together to ensure that those rights were respected was the world's solemn duty.

5. **Mr. Naeemi** (Afghanistan) said that his Government fully supported the Second United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2008-2017) and strongly believed that, provided the international community demonstrated the necessary political will and commitment and took rigorous action, poverty would be eradicated at all levels by the end of the Decade. Since poverty was a critical issue of global concern, poverty eradication should be addressed from a committed and comprehensive position. A number of factors were exacerbating poverty and making it harder for countries to attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). They included the current financial crisis; insecurity, poor infrastructure and inaccessibility of advanced technology and energy, particularly in post-conflict countries; the relative decline in agriculture; increasing oil prices and exchange rate uncertainty; growing energy demand; and limited international financial assistance and cooperation in the areas of capacity-building and rural development.

6. Agricultural development was crucial in terms of responding to the food crisis and controlling poverty globally. Indeed, agriculture was the backbone of developing countries' economies. Action was needed in all the areas mentioned and at all levels, particularly in countries with special needs, like Afghanistan, which faced many challenges associated with insecurity and soaring food and commodity prices. A food crisis would send millions into starvation and spark widespread instability.

7. A global effort was therefore needed to address the current crisis in countries on the verge of absolute poverty. He hoped that, during the Second Decade, the international community would seriously consider the critical situation of the countries concerned and adopt an inclusive policy that addressed the special conditions they faced. Poverty eradication was a collective responsibility based on the understanding that poverty was a threat to peace, security and prosperity everywhere. The enemies of peace, security, sustainable development and human rights were using poverty to advance their goals.

Agenda item 46: Information and communication technologies for development (A/63/72-E/2008/48 and A/63/180)

8. **Mr. Rahman** (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)) introduced the report of the Secretary-General on progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels (A/63/72-E/2008/48), which provided an overview of the activities undertaken by many entities in implementation of the Summit's outcomes at different levels.

9. Over half the world's population would obtain at least some level of connectivity in 2008, through mobile telephony. There had been an estimated 3.3 billion mobile phone subscribers at the end of 2007; the expected double-digit growth in 2008 would result in half the world's inhabitants having access to a mobile phone by the end of 2008. Consequently, the Summit's goal of ensuring that more than half the world's inhabitants had access to information and communications technologies (ICT) within their reach by 2015 would be met sooner than expected. In addition, 80 to 90 per cent of the world's population today lived within range of a cellular network, twice the percentage in 2000. Growth in mobile phone use had been fuelled not only by the convenience of mobile telephony and its ability to provide service where no fixed infrastructure existed, but also by its ability to provide Short Message Service (SMS). SMS provided a popular low-cost alternative to voice communications and a wide variety of data services.

10. The Internet gap was also closing, albeit slowly. In 2006, Internet penetration in developed economies had been only six times higher than in developing economies. The global Internet community had grown by almost 300 per cent between 2000 and 2008; by March 2008, Internet users worldwide had numbered 1.4 billion, giving an overall penetration rate of 21 per cent. Although many people still lacked even the most basic levels of connectivity, double-digit growth rates in developing countries meant that the digital divide was moving away from basic connectivity issues to issues of speed and availability of local services. Consequently, the "broadband divide" was gaining importance. Indeed, most local Internet services could not thrive or be used efficiently without low-cost broadband and the gap in broadband penetration between developed and developing countries had changed only marginally between 2002 and 2006.

11. Internet penetration continued to be extremely low and uneven in Africa. In addition, many African countries were not yet linked up by cable. Only the Western shore of Africa currently had a cable link and it was a very costly one. The report described in detail two interesting initiatives in that regard: the East African Submarine Cable System (EASSy), on which construction had begun in 2007, and the Connect Africa Initiative, launched in 2007.

12. Lastly, he drew attention to Economic and Social Council resolution 2008/3 entitled "Assessment of the progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society".

13. **Ms. Bilello** (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)) introduced the report of the Director-General of UNESCO on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/130, including the recommendations of the tenth United Nations Inter-Agency Round Table on Communication for Development, held in Addis Ababa in February 2007 (A/63/180).

14. Communication for development and the fostering of free and independent media were the cornerstones of inclusive knowledge societies and essential components of the UNESCO approach to communication and information, which focused on developing a coherent strategy with its partners. In the poor and marginalized communities of the developing world, information, knowledge and communication were essential tools for development, peace and security, and a basic human right. Just and effective governance required an open exchange of information and ideas. Access to two-way communication systems, meanwhile, was crucial if communities were to participate in decision-making processes relating to their own well-being. That in turn required timely and trustworthy information, professional and independent media, a twenty-first-century communications infrastructure and a commitment by the international community to foster open and active communication on all key development challenges. Earlier that week, UNESCO and Iraq's Ministry of Education had launched the Iraqi Educational Television Channel. That European Union-funded project would enable teachers and pupils prevented from attending school by

the security conditions in the country to follow the school curriculum through distance learning and, by promoting such values as peace and tolerance, would contribute to peacebuilding and reconciliation in the country.

15. The comprehensive approach to communication for development followed by UNESCO encompassed various programme areas, with special emphasis on women, young people and marginalized communities.

16. The challenges and opportunities presented by ICT were at the heart of UNESCO efforts to implement the Geneva Plan of Action. Its aim was to democratize access to information by focusing on the ability to use technology, rather than on promoting technologies themselves. Consequently, it emphasized capacity-building in support of societal transformation. In recognition of the fact that ICT could improve access to, and the quality of, education in emerging knowledge societies, UNESCO e-learning initiatives had been formalized in its publication *ICT Competency Standards for Teachers*, which defined the range of skills needed for teachers to integrate ICT effectively into the teaching/learning process.

17. With regard to promoting freedom of expression, press freedom and legislation that safeguarded the independence and plurality of the media, the Maputo Declaration adopted at the International Conference on Press Freedom, Access to Information and Empowerment of People held in Maputo, Mozambique, in May 2008 called on UNESCO to sensitize Governments to the importance of freedom of expression, including freedom to access information, and reaffirmed the principles of open government, transparency, accountability and public access to information.

18. At its twenty-sixth session in March 2008, the Intergovernmental Council of the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) had endorsed a set of media development indicators as a diagnostic tool for all concerned stakeholders and had invited the Director-General of UNESCO to share those indicators with other United Nations agencies as an important contribution to defining a unified approach towards common country assessments and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) in the fields of media development and good governance. The IPDC Intergovernmental Council's Decision on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity, meanwhile, urged all Member States concerned to notify the Director-General of UNESCO of the status of their judicial inquiries into the killings of journalists. The Decision referred specifically to Security Council resolution 1738 (2006) and emphasized the responsibility of States to prosecute those responsible for serious violations of international humanitarian law. During 2006 and 2007, IPDC had supported 113 national projects in 66 developing countries; a further 70 projects had been approved in April 2008.

19. A growing area of UNESCO involvement was media literacy education, which aimed to nurture critical thinking to ensure that new generations of news consumers would better understand why news mattered, defend the role of independent media in their communities and promote the highest standards of journalism practice within the media establishment. To that end, UNESCO had designed a Freedom of Expression Toolkit for secondary school students and developed curriculum enrichment material on media and information literacy for teacher training institutions. A fully functional media environment engaged with a discerning community strengthened civil society.

20. Moreover, UNESCO had fostered community radio initiatives, in particular the establishment of community radios owned and operated by marginalized communities. Radio remained the most accessible low-cost communication channel for rural communities. The UNESCO approach of combining community radio and telecentre facilities to form community multimedia centres had enabled marginalized communities to reap benefits from knowledge sources otherwise available only through online networks and offline digital resources. Until such time as the digital divide disappeared, existing mechanisms should be used to the fullest extent possible.

21. Lastly, UNESCO assisted independent media in conflict and post-conflict situations in gathering and disseminating non-partisan information and in contributing to peacebuilding and reconciliation processes. Inter alia, it promoted dialogue between media professionals in conflict zones and the outside world and advised the authorities of countries in post-conflict situations on drafting new media legislation, including freedom of expression legislation.

22. **Ms. Greenaway** (Antigua and Barbuda) wished to know whether the complex nature of the follow-up mechanism for the World Summit on the Information Society, as referred to in paragraph 24 of Economic and Social Council resolution E/2008/3, hindered the implementation of the outcomes of the Summit and, if so, what recommendations could be made for overcoming that obstacle.

23. **Mr. Rahman** (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) said that a wide variety of stakeholders had been encouraged to participate in the World Summit, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The complexity of ICT and the major implications they had for developing countries had in part been responsible for the Summit's being held in two phases. In addition, it had been difficult to assign responsibilities and to measure progress, owing to unavailability of data. Lack of data was partially due to the relative novelty of ICT. However, much progress had already been made in both the collection and dissemination of data, supported by the designation of certain agencies as action line facilitators. The Commission on Science and Technology for Development platform was very useful in that regard, as it sought to address issues in an inclusive manner.

24. **The Chairperson** invited the Committee to engage in a general discussion on the item.

25. **Ms. Greenaway** (Antigua and Barbuda), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the potential of science and technology to eradicate poverty and promote socio-economic development remained largely unfulfilled. There continued to be a technological divide between rich and poor countries, despite the development of a broad spectrum of new technologies. In that connection, progress on Millennium Development Goal 8 was severely lacking; the international community should in particular focus on the target of making available the benefits of new technologies.

26. A development-oriented information society was in the best interest of all humanity. Greater emphasis was needed on the transfer and dissemination of information and communications technologies to as well as within developing countries. The United Nations system played a key role in promoting and facilitating multi-stakeholder partnerships at all levels in support of developing countries' efforts to use ICT as a tool for national development.

27. Referring to paragraph 111 of the Secretary-General's report (A/63/72-E/2008/48), she said that the statement that progress "seem[ed] to be on track" suggested some uncertainty over the exact progress made. It was important to benchmark progress towards specific goals set out in the World Summit outcomes; she urged the United Nations System and the international community to take concrete action, including providing further support to the Global Digital Solidarity Fund.

28. Further emphasis should be placed on reducing the cost of communications technologies and on capacity-building, with a view to supporting countries' efforts to increase access to such technologies and to adapt them to meet local needs. Public-private partnerships and multi-stakeholder approaches were increasingly important.

29. She remained hopeful that the effective implementation of the Geneva and Tunis phases of the World Summit would help developing countries benefit fully from ICT. The continued insistence by developed countries that ICT could be made available only through the private market would not result in fulfilment of that objective. She urged the United Nations system to give priority to monitoring progress and to focus on the transfer of technology in order to facilitate a truly development-oriented information society.

30. **Mr. Delacroix** (France), speaking on behalf of the European Union; the candidate countries Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey; the stabilization and association process countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro; and, in addition, Armenia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, said that the European Union attached great importance to the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit, particularly with regard to Internet governance and reduction of the digital divide. It welcomed the forthcoming Internet Governance Forum and encouraged all stakeholders to participate actively. Referring to the recent Ministerial Conference on the Internet of the Future, at which the European Union had reaffirmed its commitment to the information society, he said that the Internet of the future would help to address major international societal issues.

31. Combating the digital divide was crucial; in that connection, France would be hosting an international

conference on digital solidarity in November 2008. The European Union welcomed the success of the Connect Africa Summit in October 2007 and reiterated its strong commitment to the Connect Africa Initiative to develop ICT infrastructure and other regional initiatives. Finally, he proposed that the United Nations should reflect on ways in which the Organization itself might usefully employ ICT, for example by providing webcasts of committee proceedings. Such an initiative would also contribute to the Organization's goal of becoming more environmentally friendly.

32. **Mr. Muita** (Kenya), speaking on behalf of the Group of African States, said that it was regrettable that ICT had not been included as one of the sectors addressed under the Goals framework, given that the digital divide was a cross-cutting obstacle to achieving the Goals. While ICT could not replace a true development strategy, they offered significant opportunities to the disadvantaged sectors of society and thus contributed meaningfully to the development process. ICT represented not only a technological, but also a socio-economic challenge. The international community should endeavour to implement the outcomes of the World Summit with a view to improving accessibility to ICT and to establishing an open, balanced, people-centred and development-oriented information society. The role of the United Nations was crucial in leading a global coordinated approach in that regard.

33. The challenges posed by the digital divide for African countries had forced them to choose between many competing goals in their development process. Indeed, bridging the digital divide required adequate resources and sustainable investments in ICT infrastructure and services, capacity-building and technology transfer. The Global Digital Solidarity Fund could play a significant role in reducing the digital divide, building an inclusive information society and putting ICT at the service of development. He called on development partners and others to provide voluntary contributions to the Fund.

34. The Group of African States welcomed the decision by the French Government to convene the first international conference on digital solidarity and hoped that it would make a positive contribution to bridging the digital divide, as well as to advancing the Review Conference on Financing for Development.

35. **Ms. Wahab** (Indonesia), speaking on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), said that ICT were essential for all aspects of development. The international community must continue to work together to accelerate the development of ICT infrastructure and services in bridging the digital divide for the benefit of all communities. Initiatives that provided the poor with access to ICT empowered them to change their circumstances by participating in the development process.

36. ICT should be used to enhance global efforts to address epidemics, food security and climate change. The use of ICT in environmental protection and disaster relief had become extremely important and should be expanded to the management of environmental data for sustainable development and disaster mitigation and preparedness.

37. It was essential to identify best practices for energy efficiency in ICT to support mitigation and adaptation measures. At the same time, different ways in which ICT could be best used to help other sectors reduce their emissions should also be explored.

38. ASEAN attached great importance to the development of the ICT sector, especially as progress was made towards achieving a connected and secure ASEAN Economic Community by 2015. It was committed to implementing the Vientiane Action Programme on telecommunications and information technology sectors, which aimed at, inter alia, achieving universal access to ICT infrastructure and services. ASEAN welcomed the continuing support of UNCTAD in assisting countries with ICT policies and strategies for the creation of a competitive information economy.

39. **Mr. Mansour** (Tunisia) said that his country had made ICT one of the main pillars of its development strategy. In recent years, a series of reforms had been implemented in the communications sector, particularly to develop the organizational and regulatory framework, modernize telecommunications infrastructure, expand the knowledge economy and improve productivity. Currently, nearly one quarter of the population used the Internet, supplied by both public and private companies, most educational establishments were connected to the Internet, and a national programme to provide low-cost computers on credit also gave access to families. In addition, mobile

telephony was available to about 85 per cent of the population.

40. According to the report of the Secretary-General (A/63/72-E/2008/48), the digital divide had moved from inequalities in basic quantity and access to include differences in quality and capacity, since the cost of broadband connection was inversely proportionate to the level of development. It appeared that ICT development was reproducing the same disparities and becoming a source of marginalization rather than an element of integration, and that the digital divide was symptomatic of the social divide and the product of an imbalanced global economic context. Thus, there was not only a technological but also a socio-economic challenge, since ICT could not replace a real development policy. However, owing to their ability to accelerate the development process and the achievement of the MDGs, ICT conditioned the way of life and living standards of entire societies. Despite the progress made at the national, regional and international levels, not all countries had been able to take advantage of the digital revolution and establish the conditions for a global digital partnership based on solidarity, complementarity and cooperation.

41. The international community had the obligation to implement the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society to help bridge the digital divide and establish an open, equitable and development-oriented information society. Lastly, his delegation welcomed the contribution of the United Nations Group on the Information Society and recommended providing more information on its work, particularly in New York, to the States Members.

42. **Mr. Chen** Ming (China) said that ICT accelerated the dissemination of knowledge, expanded the scope of information flow, and enhanced contacts and understanding among the people of the world. The 2008 Olympic Games held recently in Beijing had been the first ever "broadband Olympics". Thanks to an impressive technological infrastructure, ICT had allowed viewers around the world to witness the event in real time, helping to spread inspiration and hope to humanity. In addition, information, photographs and videos had been transmitted instantly to news services and to mobile telephones.

43. ICT had tremendous potential for boosting social progress and economic growth, but its development was very uneven. New technology was being developed rapidly and a knowledge-based economy was emerging; however, owing to poverty, about one sixth of the world's children were still deprived of the right to education. Poverty and lack of education went hand in hand: children without education lacked skills to emerge from poverty. China called on the developed countries to help the developing countries extend education and training, particularly in the area of science and technology, and build the capacity of poor regions to promote education and eradicate poverty. China was convinced that ICT would play an important role in delivering results for the people most in need and helping them to achieve the MDGs.

44. **Mr. Anwar** (India) said that the fact that it was estimated that by the end of 2008 half the world's population would have access to a mobile telephone demonstrated that developing countries did not have to follow the same sequence of technology development as developed countries. While India was among the successful examples of mobile telephony penetration, issues related to the quality and affordability of Internet access were widening the digital divide; greater efforts were required by the international community to bridge the gap.

45. ICT were crucial to development efforts, particularly in view of their positive influence in almost every field, reducing transaction costs, expanding access to remote areas, improving the marketing capabilities of the rural poor, reducing intermediaries in production chains, and enhancing Government accountability and democratic participation. However, infrastructure and human resources remained a crucial constraint. The international community should therefore extend its technical and financial support, particularly through the United Nations, to ensure that developing countries could make ICT available to millions.

46. ICT represented one of the fastest-growing sectors of Indian industry, in particular in the area of software development and services, which had generated growth and employment. Business process outsourcing had been a key element in the rapid growth, leading to the acceptance of an information technology-based global delivery model. The employment generated by the growth in the ICT sector had had a positive impact on the domestic economy, giving rise to a number of other industries. Proactive Government policies had made an important contribution to India's success, testifying to the fact

that the private and State sectors could work together effectively.

47. India was also using ICT for development and had formulated a five-year national e-governance plan encompassing road transport, taxes, agriculture, land registration, education, postal services and identification documents. To facilitate access, efforts were being focused on developing software in multiple Indian languages and reducing costs. ICT were also being used to reach rural areas with initiatives such as tele-education and telemedicine. Within the framework of South-South cooperation, India had been providing assistance in setting up a pan-African e-network project linking major universities and hospitals in different regions of Africa with major Indian universities and hospitals, and providing assistance for information technology capacity-building in several partner countries in Africa and Asia.

48. **Mr. Seye** (Senegal) said that ICT evidently held great promise, but also the risk of leaving much of the global population behind. Accordingly, they should not be considered an end in themselves, but rather an effective means of promoting sustainable development, which explained why Africa had decided to incorporate ICT into its development priorities. Nevertheless, as the report of the Secretary-General (A/63/72-E/2008/48) had underlined, despite some positive trends, Africa was the continent that was benefiting least from the digital revolution and much of its population remained on the outskirts of the information society. The situation gave cause for concern, but was explained by the high cost of communications, and the absence of adequate infrastructure, and human and financial resources.

49. The worthy intention of facilitating the use of ICT in developing countries inspired the principle of digital solidarity, and the creation of the Digital Solidarity Fund responded to a desire to provide a pertinent response to the challenge of the digital divide. Digital solidarity proposed a "win-win" partnership, not only encouraging the strengthening of the digital capacity of the South, but also opening up new market opportunities for partner countries and firms. The Fund, which operated exclusively with voluntary public or private contributions, under the "1 per cent digital solidarity principle", was already functioning, mainly in the field of telemedicine and tele-education. Senegal invited members of the global society who had not already done so to contribute to that innovative instrument. A first conference on digital solidarity and financing would be held in November 2008 to identify priorities and negotiate an international convention.

50. Senegal endorsed the proposal to make use of the immense potential represented by ICT for economic and social development. It was already a member of the global telecommunications network and had set up a regulatory agency and an e-governance initiative that made public actions more effective and transparent and reduced bureaucracy. The Government was also developing a programme to provide computers to all schools and had enacted a law introducing the 1 per cent digital solidarity principle for all public procurement contracts for digital goods and services. The Internet was not a luxury; it offered developing countries a shortcut to economic development.

51. **Ms. Midaoui** (Morocco) said that ICT were crucial if developing countries were to close the gap separating them from developed countries. As stated in the Secretary-General's report (A/63/72-E/2008/48), there were wide discrepancies: although the number of Internet users had increased a thousandfold over the period 2000-2008, Africa accounted for only 3.5 per cent of such users. Her delegation therefore welcomed the fact that the Global Digital Solidarity Fund, set up following the World Summit on the Information Society in 2003, of which Morocco was a founder member, had established objectives to meet the requirements of developing countries, such as reducing the digital divide and providing general access to new communication technologies. Morocco had, through the Fund, demonstrated its solidarity with the African countries by working to bridge the digital divide. It had organized the third of the African Free Software Meetings in Rabat in November 2007, with the theme "Free software and education". It also supported the Connect Africa Initiative launched at the Connect Africa Summit held in Kigali in October 2007. The Initiative aimed to mobilize human, financial and technical resources throughout Africa in order to put ICT within the reach of all African rural communities by 2015.

52. In 2005, Morocco had launched its national cyber strategy, e-Morocco 2010, one objective being to reduce the digital divide. In order to remedy persistent problems with access or insufficient know-how, the strategy focused on four main topics: the development of content that would be useful and relevant in a

national context; the availability of an efficient infrastructure at the lowest possible price; access by all Moroccans to the information society; and ICT training at all levels.

53. The other strategic objective of e-Morocco 2010 was to improve Morocco's international standing. ICT represented a powerful engine for the country's economic development, enabling it to galvanize foreign trade, attract foreign capital investment and encourage ICT industries to relocate to Morocco or set up offshore arrangements. The strategy had worked. After just over a decade of creating an environment suitable for the development of the sector, Morocco currently found itself in a very favourable position. The liberalization of the sector had led to strong competition, resulting in a significant fall in prices and an improvement in the services available.

54. The launch of electronic commerce — one feature of e-Morocco 2010 — was currently in progress. It had, however, necessitated the establishment of a suitable legal environment, with regard to protection of personal data and intellectual property. Legislative reform relating to foreign exchange and online payment systems was also required. E-government had been introduced and was operational in a number of sectors, including customs, security, education and Government procurement. Another project — to set up interconnection links — was currently under way. ICT also provided a considerable amount of direct and indirect employment and contributed significantly to the gross domestic product.

55. At the international level, Morocco had acceded to the Basic Telecommunications Agreement of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and accepted the Fourth Protocol relating to basic telecommunications liberalization. It was also opening up its telecommunications market by authorizing foreign firms to provide telecommunications services in its territory. Morocco had also acceded to the WTO Information Technology Agreement in November 2003, which had made it easier to access ICT products on the national market and facilitated the wider use of telecommunications, including multimedia services. Its accession to the Agreement had attracted foreign investors, with a consequent positive effect on the development of the country's ICT industries and electronic commerce.

56. Success had bred success and the country's largest operator had gone international. Indeed, the wider availability of ICT and the development of modern infrastructure had enabled many Moroccan firms to expand abroad, especially in West Africa. That had led to an increase in regional and continental trade flows and thus had an impact on poverty. At times of transition, it was essential for countries to take full advantage of new technologies.

57. **Mr. Al-Murbati** (Bahrain) said that his country was already using e-government for such activities as utility bill payments and visa applications, and was planning to add numerous other services in the near future. His Government had collaborated with Microsoft Corporation to train teachers to incorporate ICT into education, launched the King Hamad Schools of the Future Project, and donated $435,000 to fund the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa Prize for the Use of Information and Communication Technologies in Education. It had been the first in the region to introduce a multipurpose "smart card" that functioned as an identity card, driver's licence, voter registration, and travel document for the Gulf region, and had also been the first in the region to conduct an online referendum. It had worked with the private sector to facilitate online investing and to encourage small and medium-sized enterprises to conduct business online. His country had been recognized internationally as a regional leader in e-government and ICT, and had been selected by UNESCO as the site for its planned Regional Centre for Information and Communication Technology and as the permanent host country for the newly formed Gulf e-Commerce Forum.

58. **Mr. Shautsou** (Belarus) said that the Secretary-General's report (A/63/72-E/2008/48) drew attention to the large number of initiatives throughout the world aimed at bridging the digital divide between developed, developing and transitional countries. The report also noted the inadequacy of existing coordination mechanisms and the need to improve the synergies of the World Summit on the Information Society Task Force and other international ICT initiatives. The report itself would improve the situation, with its call for the speedy introduction of measures to facilitate the distribution, development and use of ICT, the basic outlines of which were set out in the Millennium Declaration.

59. The report also contained a number of interesting practical recommendations for harnessing the potential of business and civil society in achieving the aims of the World Summit. Serious consideration should be given to the proposal that progress towards the attainment of the targets and goals set out in the Geneva Plan of Action and the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society should be benchmarked.

60. Belarus understood the need to enhance its ICT potential, close the digital divide between urban and rural areas, and develop and install up-to-date high-technology systems in the field of telemedicine, electronic commerce, biometric passport and visa controls and distance learning. It was actively working on introducing electronic government, which would involve a central State information resource. The Ministry of Communications and Information Technology was coordinating a network of automated systems for government departments as part of the State ICT programme "Electronic Belarus". Another important project was to create an electronic version of the archives of the new national library and to introduce a corporate cataloguing system to provide the widest possible range of local and foreign users with easy access to the library's holdings.

61. **Mr. Patriota** (Brazil) said that the importance of ICT for development had been widely recognized. The next step was to decide — and adopt a resolution on — the best way of implementing the Tunis Agenda. It was unfortunate, therefore, that a central element of the Agenda — enhanced cooperation — had not been achieved. The Secretary-General's report (A/63/72-E/2008/48) noted that consultations with 11 organizations had "elicited a range of different views on the implications of what had been agreed at Tunis on the topic and that there was little common ground". Those consultations were crucial to determining a role for the United Nations in the debate on ICT for development and the thorny issue of Internet governance. The results of the consultative process should be conveyed to members as soon as possible, with the Secretary-General's recommendations on the best way to proceed.

62. The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) had been attached to the United Nations Secretariat but no specific regular budget allocation had yet been made. It was therefore compelled to rely on voluntary contributions. The precarious nature of such an arrangement was demonstrated by the fact that simply by holding the second meeting of IGF in Rio in 2007 and bearing its costs, Brazil had become a major contributor to the Forum. To accomplish its mission, IGF clearly needed extra funds, especially in order to support greater participation by developing countries, which had been conspicuously and systematically underrepresented, both in consultation meetings and in the Forum itself. The standards set by the Tunis Agenda had not been fully met. It was therefore important to fund the Forum adequately and ensure enhanced cooperation, under the Secretary-General's leadership. The spirit of the Tunis Agenda should be kept alive through implementation of the agreements already reached.

63. **Ms. Filip** (Observer for the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)) said that the mandate of the joint United Nations-IPU Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, established in 2006, was to assist parliaments in tapping into the unique opportunities provided by ICT. In 2008, the Board of the Centre had invited all parliaments to hold discussions on the status of the information society in their countries and to ensure that, by 2020, authoritative and complete information on all stages of the legislative process was accessible on the Internet.

64. In May 2008, the Centre had brought together members of parliamentary committees dealing with ICT to discuss experiences and different perspectives. The meeting had highlighted common concerns, such as the need for an appropriate global response to cybercrime and cyberterrorism, while respecting fundamental rights, such as the right to privacy.

65. Other concerns had also been aired. A member of the Rwandan Senate had noted that, despite the existence of a number of laws dealing with specific aspects of ICT, Rwanda lacked an overarching law that would cover such areas as e-government, electronic security and electronic privacy. The Rwandan Parliament was taking the lead in promoting the marketing of intangible goods — knowledge and information — in the African region.

66. A member of the Danish Parliament had discussed the Parliament's role in bringing the information society to all. Following a resolution adopted in Parliament, an agreement had been reached between the central and local governments and the Danish regions and mandatory open standards for software in the public sector had come into effect in

2008, the aim being to ensure that the authorities' use of ICT supported the public's democratic right to receive and send digital information.

67. The Centre's other activity was to support parliamentary administrations in using modern technology in order to become more transparent, accessible and accountable and to empower people to be more engaged in public life. In February 2008, the Centre, IPU and the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs had published the first World e-Parliament Report, based on data from 105 assemblies, which had concluded that a significant gap remained between what was possible with ICT and what had actually been accomplished by parliaments. Only 10 per cent of the chambers surveyed made extensive use of ICT. At least 10 per cent — and perhaps as many as 30 per cent — were significantly constrained by lack of resources. The status of the ICT systems and services of other parliaments varied. Even if adopted, many ICT applications appeared to operate at the lowest level of utility and had not been used to improve efficiency or offer additional services. If the use of ICT was to increase, there would need to be greater cooperation and coordination among parliaments and other stakeholders.

68. **Mr. Clough** (United Nations Industrial Development Organisation) (UNIDO)) said that UNIDO was fully committed to harnessing ICT for development and helping international efforts to bridge the digital divide. It was increasingly clear that innovation-driven productivity gains must become the engine of growth for manufacturing industries. Countries therefore had to devote special efforts to keeping up with technological advances. At the same time, the role of ICT in promoting social transformation should not be underestimated: they could end the isolation of individual poor people overnight.

69. UNIDO conducted programmes to upgrade enterprises and build trade capacity, a key element of its approach being to mobilize the private sector's expertise in ICT to promote social and economic development. To that end, it had in the past two years signed partnership agreements with two major ICT companies, Microsoft and Hewlett-Packard.

70. The partnership with Microsoft focused on the development and growth of small and medium-sized enterprises through the use of ICT. Specific activities included the establishment of a business information network in Uganda, which had received an Africa Investor Award in 2007; a three-way partnership between UNIDO, Microsoft and the Government of Uganda on establishing an innovation centre to devise software solutions that addressed the needs of small-scale entrepreneurs in Africa; and the development of an innovative pro-poor business model for the establishment of computer refurbishment centres. The model could make ICT more accessible to people at the bottom of the economic pyramid, while putting in place structures to ensure that electronic waste was properly disposed of. The model had significant potential to be adopted on a wider scale.

71. The partnership with Hewlett-Packard had resulted in the Graduate Entrepreneurship Development Training through IT (GET-IT) programme, which was already being deployed in a number of African countries, including Egypt, Morocco, Nigeria, South Africa, Tunisia and Uganda, and was expected to be extended to other countries in Africa and the Middle East. The partnership promoted the use of ICT for skills development and capacity-building, thus helping to reduce poverty in the participating countries.

72. The promotion of ICT for development should take particular account of gender issues. With limited access to schooling, women were less likely than men, especially in rural areas, to have ICT skills. It was therefore crucial for the international community to foster women's equal participation in the information society. UNIDO designed its projects in such a way as to cater to the specific needs of women entrepreneurs.

73. Lastly, he drew attention to a recent UNIDO publication, entitled *Building e-competence: enabling small business to access opportunities through Information and Communication Technology*, which provided further information on the UNIDO approach to ICT for development.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.